

DECORATION IN THE THEATRE



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DECORATION IN THE ART OF THE THEATRE

A LECTURE BY ALBERT RUTHERSTON, DELIVERED AT LEEDS
UNIVERSITY, FEBRUARY, 1915, AND FOREWORD BY THE SAME



THE MONTHLY CHAPBOOK

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Edited by Harold Monroe

Foreword

THE lecture which is herein published was written in the latter months of 1914, before the war had made impossible those normal activities of work and peaceful effort which were then our daily life ; I mention this date because it has importance, taking into consideration some of the subject matter of the lecture.

In speaking of decoration as applied to the Art of the Theatre, it was impossible to avoid mention of the German and Russian Theatres in comparison with our own ; in those early days of the war no apology was needed for the mention or discussion of æsthetic values, where they touched on German Art or thought. Had my lecture been written a few months later, the task of freely stating views I held as true ones in this connection would have been more difficult and it would have been in bad taste possibly, to choose such a moment to give expression to them.

To-day, coming back to my work with a fresh and open mind, after having voluntarily played my own small part as a soldier, I have earned, I feel, the right to emphasise that which I wrote in all good faith and sincerity in days when the joy of my artists' world seemed to outweigh all other considerations. That which I found true with regard to our own and other theatres in 1914, I find true to-day, true that is in matter of broad principle, and my lecture attempts to deal with the principle only, not with the detail of the subject concerned.

Returning to a life I had deserted in 1915, I have set about my task by rolling up my shirt sleeves and sweeping out my house. Through every portfolio I have searched and in each corner of my workroom, sitting in stern judgment on my former work. The task has been an illuminating one to myself.

Among other work of the past I found this lecture, read it again, and thought its purpose plain and good ; then I remembered that it was to have been published shortly after it was written, but that

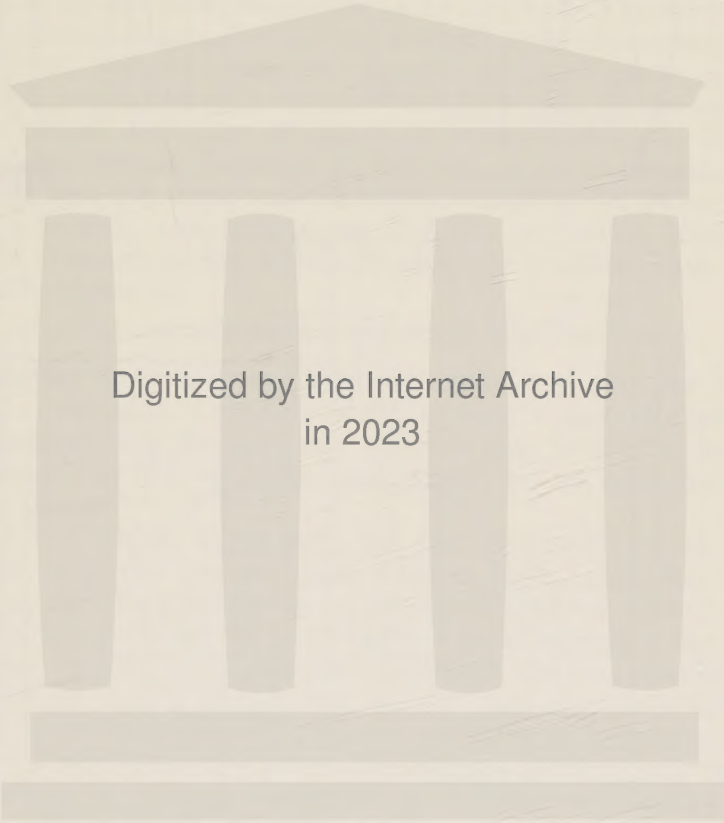
my would-be publisher, Harold Monro, had himself packed up to join the rest and had left London. With the revival of my old idea I approached Monro again and reminded him of his former kindly intention, with the present result. No word of the original text has been altered by me to-day ; written as it was at a period when I was working in the Theatre, striving for the fulfilment of principles I had come to believe in, hoping for fine results which the experiments of the few true workers had begun to justify, I feel very strongly that what was a crying need in our Theatre then is no less a one at the present time.

Were I to re-write the lecture now I might express myself, and probably should do so, in different terms ; I believe, however, that no real apology is needed for the appearance of it in its original state at this late date.

The energies and effort of those who, like myself, believe in the Theatre, in its utility and necessity as an everyday instrument, and who would see it take its place as a fine medium of expression, are more needed than ever before, if the Theatre in England is to be given real life, and the power to express also, the finer feelings, imagination and spirit of a great nation.

Above all, these efforts should not make for conscious preciousness or sensationalism, pretending to appeal to the few only ; but they should attempt that broader and bigger thing we have learned to recognise as essential to every form of true achievement in what we term a work of Art.

July, 1919.



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Decoration in the Art of the Theatre

IT is with extreme trepidation that I venture to address you on a subject so dangerous as the title of my lecture may seem to imply.

On the face of it, decoration in the Art of the Theatre suggests a happy state of things, about which it would seem almost impossible to lay down definite rules, for the art of the Theatre and the decoration concerned with that art (and these two things are really one—or should be) seem almost a non-existent thing in England to-day. I say almost, for there is, happily, some small evidence of exception, and it is upon such an island or oasis of hope that I trust to find a footing, and from there to build on certain ideas, very simple in themselves, but which the usages of tradition have almost completely obscured.

§ I

Let me say at once that I shall not attempt to play the scholar with you, even were I capable of taking such a part. We will concern ourselves with the past only where it may help us to judge of the present. For it is with the present that we are concerned, and with the future.

You will, I think, agree with me that in respect of all things connected with the arts we must wish to light a new fire in our own time, and if we make use of the grate that has served others before us, it is because the grate itself is good enough; but of the dead ashes we may both safely and willingly dispose, thanking the gods when we have a good broom at least, and so get our chance.

The Theatre is a very odd and curious thing as it stands to-day. We know it as a house we go to sometimes, a house where we seek to be amused or tickled, depressed or uplifted—to hear or see a particular person or a particular scene; in fact, we go there for many and different reasons: very few of us, though, go with an insistence that whatever we are to be given should be perfect of its

kind, not piecemeal but as a whole, and like an admirable dinner, faultless from start to finish both as regards that which we are given and the manner in which we are given it.

A comedy is a no less serious thing than a tragedy and the same perfections exist in Congreve or Farquhar as in Ibsen, or a tragedy by Shakespeare. But what we are too often given is a popular comedian or comedienne in our Congreve or Farquhar, tragedian or tragedienne in our Ibsen or Shakespeare, playing the principal rôles, whilst the other characters are considered of little importance : and with this we are supposed to content ourselves.

Now this is a very wrong thing indeed; and it is even more wrong than we might at first suppose, for not only should all the characters in any play be given an equal importance, but—and here we plant the first seed for our real subject and argument—every single object, every single scene, and every single arrangement in that play, should be equally cared for. In short, a perfection of the whole must be aimed at, and not the success of some particular person or moment.

When we go to see a play, no matter what play, no matter what theatre, whose theatre or kind of theatre, we should ask and demand as a matter of course that which we ask and demand as a matter of course when we go to eat our dinner. We are not content then with a brilliantly excellent chop, and a bad potato ; a clean tablecloth, but a waiter who drops things on it and on us persistently. Were this to happen we should leave off going to this particular eating house and try another. Should this, too, prove equally bad we might—if we were enterprising—try another, and so on : and if all failed, then we would eat at home, or cook our own chops in preference to such everlasting and insufferable slovenliness. In fact, we would insist on something better, and failing that, we'd do without it, and we'd tell our friends perhaps, and say " this is absurd and insufferable, and why shouldn't we—rather than endure all this beastliness—make our own eating house and have it run and managed as a decent eating house should be run and managed."

You will perhaps forgive me that I use such a commonplace

instance : I use it precisely for the reason that it is commonplace. Painting, Sculpture, Music, Architecture, the Theatre, every art, these should be used as ordinary and everyday things, out of which we may get all possible pleasure, help and enjoyment, and not as rare luxuries which are brought out of dark and safe hiding places. They should be part of our daily scheme of life, so that we know and are familiar with them, and when we are given what is bad and dishonest we are not taken in, but, demanding a decent standard, get it as a matter of course.

It might well be objected here that we do use the Theatre in an everyday sense, and of course this is true to some extent ; but we do not, I think, use it in the right way or demand of it those qualities which it should, and can, offer us. It is a little as though we gave a motor-car to a savage—a nice and intelligent savage—who, though, had never seen or heard of one before ; he would certainly sit in it and play with its levers, but it is extremely doubtful if, of his own accord, he would learn to start it off and drive it away.

We are at present more familiar with pictures, sculpture, buildings, and the other arts, than we are with the Theatre and its possibilities, and we do not tolerate a piece of carving—say of a woman—the one side and arm of which are well modelled and hewn, the rest bad, careless, and scamped.

We must not allow the Theatre a different standard than that we apply to any other form of art, and if the Theatre is to take its place side by side on terms of equality with the other arts which, in theory, it is presumed to do, we must apply to it the highest standards and judge of it as one complete whole.

Before we go further and proceed to our subject proper, I want you to understand that the art of the Theatre and its decoration as a vital and essential part of it, which we are about to discuss, has nothing whatsoever to do with a certain form of modern play where a complete and often dreary realism is attempted and practised, and where the Theatre is used as a sort of pulpit for the solving of questions of morality or fashion. With such plays a decorator, in our sense of the word, can have no truck, and his presence indeed

hardly is necessary—a Maple or Shoolbred will suffice ; the facts are bald and are baldly stated, and no further imagination is required. Such plays may have an interest for us insomuch as they represent an endeavour to throw on the screen a picture of our personal doings, struggles, scruples, muddles, and so forth, but from the point of view purely of the Theatre, qua such, they have no interest whatsoever ; they neither belong there nor are born of it. On the contrary, they are born from among certain writers, public moralists, and journalists, who, apparently, not content with their own particular business in life, use the Theatre merely as a speaking platform for their own ideas, without having the smallest particle of gift for making use of that more imaginative side of it for which it exists or might exist. It is to me very like a man insisting on the most beautiful and noble organ on which to practise, over and over again, a few simple scales.

Perhaps the reason for this bad habit is not hard to find, and we are all of us attracted readily by the idea of someone else's job which, at first sight, may seem certainly more attractive, and at least as simple and easy as our own, and the Theatre appears to act as a formidable " Loadstone " in this respect.

I know I've always got a desire to paint a pot when I see one delightfully painted. This, however, is wrong, and unless I'm prepared to throw up everything else and to devote myself to this particular craft, then I have no right to practise it at all.

Of course plays by such men as Ibsen, Dostoiewski, Barker, Synge, Galsworthy, Yeats, Masfield, McEvoy, and many others, are not at all realistic in the sense which I mean. They happen to be modern, that is all, but they are entirely of the Theatre, and are conceived and inspired by virtue of its intense possibilities for the dramatic, the poetic, and the imaginative.

Here, then, we have, I trust, made clear our path, and it will be understood that when we speak of " Decoration " in relation to the Theatre, it is the real Theatre of which we are speaking, a thing capable of being tuned to any pitch, wherein may be evolved Poetry, Drama, Movement, Mystery, all the most precious things—a Catholic Cathedral—the finest Theatre in the world.

§ II

Let us turn now to the empty shell of the Theatre as it exists before we set to work in it, and of which I would like to give you some notion as to how it is made up, and how the parts work or do not work.

It is divided into two distinct and separate sections called technically "The Front of the House" and "The Back of the House." The former consists of the owner, business manager, booking office, clerical staff, backers (if there are any, and, alas, there generally are). With this side we are not concerned.

With the other side we are, and it is made up of a personnel of stage managers, the actors and actresses, stage carpenters, scene shifters, electricians, dressers, flymen, property masters, and many others. It should consist also of workshops for the costumiers and all the other workers and craftsmen who are necessary for the life and furnishing of a stage.

As a matter of fact, with our Theatre in England it does not, and here begins the first mistake. All these very important workers and craftsmen are, as a rule, called in from the outside, very often at the last moment, and have to do their work hurriedly—most probably without the smallest knowledge of its intention, certainly with no connective feeling, one piece of work, for instance, being sent to "A" firm, another to "B," and so on.

It is absolutely necessary if a good result is to be obtained that this big army of workers work together as one man for a common object, an object they know of, under the supervision of one man, and one man only. This one man must be the brain, the eyes, and the ears of this part of the Theatre, where the concrete results—as regards the Art of it—are evolved and produced. Later I will give you an example of such a Theatre, but for the moment we will leave it.

I have just stated that one man shall command, and only one, and naturally I mean it, and I am, of course, alluding to that side of the Theatre with which we are concerned in particular, and which—for the sake of convenience and for the want of a better

name—we will call the “ Decorative Side ” ; and by this I mean everything that concerns the mounting and staging of a play—the dresses, lighting, grouping, etc., in fact every detail, large and small, concerning the appearance of the stage and the mimes on it. For it is with all this that your designer or decorator is concerned, and not only should he design and arrange all these things and control his workers in the making of them or of their arrangement, but he must control also the passive action of the play—the grouping of the figures, the lighting of them, and of the scene as stated above.

As to the question of one man writing the play and producing it, designing the production, being in himself responsible from start to finish, this undoubtedly would be the ideal thing, and there is perhaps one man living to-day capable of doing all this ; but I cannot regard seriously myself this aspect of the case, for such a man must be born among us so rarely, and come so seldom to the generations and decades that, in our argument for what is essentially necessary, and as to what must be applied to our Theatre in the general sense, we can hardly make a rule of so exceptional an apparition or occurrence.

We must have, then, our staff of workers and craftsmen under the command and control of our one man who is responsible for the Decoration of the play in every detail. This man is the designer, and he must work in such close conjunction with the producer that the joint becomes non-existent, which is to say that before either of these two men set to work on a production every detail of action and method shall have been discussed and threshed out to the full—nothing being left to chance and the whole agreed on completely.

This settled, our designer may begin and set his imagination to work, and he must not only design his scenes, dresses, properties, etc., but must himself supervise the making of them in every detail. To design alone is useless ; to carry out the designs and to know exactly how they should and can be carried out, is one of the most important things of all. He must possess, in short, a very considerable technical knowledge of each one of his several departments,

and he must not seldom train his workers—or, what is infinitely more difficult, must often make an experienced worker working in the wrong way learn to work in the right way. He must one minute paint on a scene, and the next cut out a dress which his cutter has failed to do properly. If there is much carpentry for a built scene, he has to be certain of its accuracy down to the minutest part of an inch. He must know how his properties should be made, how painted, and how finished. In fact, he must measure and reckon, invent and plan, to a point of absolute exactitude, and remember that this is only the beginning of it all. No smallest detail should escape him or be beyond his power of control, and emergencies of every kind are met at each turn of the road once we are at work on any production, however small or great.

A designer must be architect and mathematician, painter, sculptor, carpenter, and dressmaker, and with all this, possess not a little good temper and the knowledge of how to use his people and get the best out of them. This, you will say, sounds almost “Napoleonic” and bordering on the impossible, but I answer that it must be possible, and that it is absolutely necessary and essential.

§ III

Here, then, you have the duties of your designer as regards the foundation of the craft itself, and we will pass on now to the larger and broader view of its expression, by which I mean the art of the Theatre or that art as it should be.

To begin with, let me say at once that I consider any form of *exact* realism in the Theatre wrong, and as in painting, sculpture, and all the arts we demand higher qualities than a mere copying of nature, so must we look for the same in the Theatre. The mere copying of familiar objects such as men and women, trees, and indeed anything in nature, however faithfully or slavishly done, is a very poor affair indeed as an end in itself. We need those qualities of creation, imagination, and vision without which there is no true or great work of art.

When we judge of the past, and with the perspective which time

lends to make our judgment the more certain, we find that it is this particular quality of the creative vision which allies the great artists, the one to the other, in a common brotherhood, and however different or diverse they may be in any particular manner of expression or execution, (neither the skill nor the technique matter—these are accidental) it is the fact that there was matter to express, the mind working to express itself, and creation following which is important.

You will, of course, grasp my meaning in regard to “realism,” and not imagine that, in its right and proper sense, I give it no place in the scheme of things. I do, but granting only that “realism” be not a form but a result of expression—in other words—a thing producing a sense of possibility and reality, not reproductive simply, in a photographic sense, of the concrete object.

In one form of painting, for instance, a work may be what we call “realistic” as opposed to a different form of painting, but if it be a good painting it will not be imitative only, and will possess such a high quality of imagination as will convince us of something keenly seen, felt and visualised, desired and loved. The manner of presenting any form being largely one of suitability of medium in relation to purpose, mood and place, and anyone of us must express himself differently in oil paints than he would in fresco or mosaic. So I maintain that in the Theatre, apart from all else, what we call “realistic methods” fail to carry conviction and do not express any sense of reality; in other words, the Theatre and the material we have to use there are the wrong mediums for such methods.

This, then, is something to start on, and when we examine the Theatre in England to-day, and look for a gleam of any form of imaginative expression, we must suffer defeat, almost, at the outset.

Indeed, the complete absence in the Theatre of any serious thought or idea with regard to its oneness is such that the people as a whole do not even think of looking for it, and are content to accept a form of jerry-building, often skilful enough, but wrong, ridiculous, and pathetic.

When further we come to consider how this jerry-building is done, it is at once obvious why the final result of it is so poor.

Even where there may be found some slight semblance of an idea, it is impossible for a dozen, six, or even three men, working separately, to succeed in producing together this single idea. They must fail before ever they begin.

If you accept this argument, it will, I think, be conclusive of our statement that the Decoration of a play must be the work and conception of one mind only. We come therefore to the question as to how the actual Decoration should be attempted, and a very large question this is.

First and foremost, it must depend upon the play, a point by the way which, simple and obvious as it may appear, has, you will be surprised to learn, little or no consideration amongst most of our producers and designers to-day, and you will find that the same old genre of flatly painted scenes, etc., are used for every conceivable thing and manner of thing, whilst real imitation apple-trees, in blossom or out of it, roses on trellises, bushes and coloured grasses are given us prodigally, regardless of expense or meaning.

In short, the bad habit of the realistic object has become part and parcel of our Theatre, whilst practically no attention or thought has been given to the one crying problem in the matter of stage decoration, which must be the foundation for everything, on which we must (apart from the necessities of atmosphere and feeling which the action and meaning of the play itself demand and inspire) build the relation between a living and moving thing, the actor, to his background.

It will be obvious the moment we begin to think of this, that it is wrong that the actor, alive, moving, and speaking, should have as his (or her) background a thing which, though lifeless, pretends to live, this too being its only merit, if so we can call it for the moment. For we may take it for granted that, as an "exact" representation, has been the decorator's aim in the matter of background, a mere faithful copying, a naturalistic representation (often well enough achieved in itself, for your scene painter is very skilled in his work at times) will be the only result. No attention will have been paid to that all important relation between actor and background, which is of the highest value and which must be achieved.

No amount of skilful and clever scene painting, or ingenuity of sham representation can achieve it.

We must contrive, then, that actor and setting (by which we mean background, or the filling of a limited space within the proscenium wherein and against which the actor must for the moment live for us), we must contrive that these two things, different elements, should assume the right value the one to the other, both elements, the living mime and the humanly conceived setting, playing, as it were, into one another's hands, so that each is indispensable to the other, making together one complete whole.

We can all of us realise the beauty of a gay bunch of flowers placed against, let us say, a white wall. Immediately the room is filled with colour, and we observe not only how wonderful the flowers themselves are, their colour, form, and droop, but also how wonderful that piece of white wall has become in its relation to them. Place them, however, against a mass of imitation flowers and the result will be an ugly confusion ; we see neither the beauty of the real nor the quality or ingenuity of the imitation.

So it must be in the Theatre. By an arrangement of the material at our disposal we must contrive what I will call a " decorative suggestion " and in proper relation to our mimes, give a sense of the tragic or the gay, of breadth, height, space, depth, or the reverse, by means of contrast and suggestion and not by an attempted imitation. It will then be found that the beauty and significance so created will directly correspond to the imaginative power of your decorator.

You will, of course, realise that I do not mean this to apply alone to the more epic side of the Theatre. It should apply and be applied to everything. We can speak of Fragonard and Giotto in the same breath, of Longhi and Rembrandt : the difference is only one of particular vision, the vital thing being that the vision is there, living and lively, so creating a life of its own.

§ IV

Let us suppose for a moment that we have a scene to construct which must represent a great and noble building, and let us consider the primary and fundamental phases through which we must

travel in order to lay our foundation for producing such an effect.

In the first place, with this *idée fixe* of a great and noble building constantly before us, we set to work and look at our stage from the point of view of "plan" knowing that at such a point so many figures must move on and off, move about, be much in evidence, or the reverse, measuring all this accurately, reckoning where the scene which is set before, and where the scenes to follow will come. We look next up above and see that we have equal room to move freely here, so that our scene may come and go quickly and smoothly.

Thus we gradually work out to a nicety the exact height, width, length, and depth in which we have room to work for our scene ; from where it will be possible to light it, how we wish to light it, etc. All this we shall do with a scale model of the stage for which we are working.

Having settled these things we can then start from "plan" to "elevation," and let imagination loose with a view to the space we know we are free to employ.

Secondly, we should perhaps argue thus :—This building which we have to conceive and construct must be a noble affair ; therefore the effect must be one of a solid thing, and no ulterior painting of bricks and mortar will help us : it should furthermore be a great thing, and what we see of it must suggest this, therefore the actor shall be made to look as small as possible, and the building as high as possible, and we might make it fill all the stage or go away out of sight, and so on ; until on paper and on our model we have worked out the form and the shape of it.

Then we may add to it our final notion of its colour and decoration, but not till then, for however beautiful this final decoration may be, without the form and proportion it is useless. Therefore it must come last and not first in our scheme of things.

This, broadly speaking, seems to me to be the crux of a matter of this kind, and it is obviously impossible for me to tell you how, exactly, I would design and make a problematical scene : indeed ways and means are solved only when we are at work on them. The principle is what we are concerned with here, and the rest can be of little interest and of still less use.

You will, I know, see my point in all this, and not blame me for an insistent pedantry when you realise how such a scene is usually presented to you. Through a proscenium opening, perhaps 24 ft. in width you are given, let us say, the whole of the National Gallery and a part of Charing Cross Road ; so that a single mime in front of it will cover most of the portico of the National Gallery, my instance reveals what pitfalls exact realism may have in store. It would be hard for the most enthusiastic advocate of realism to defend so grotesque a spectacle on purely realistic grounds.

Yet this is an example of a most common occurrence, all because, as you will perceive, the actor, poor fellow, happens to be there. Were it not so then we might enjoy a very skilful piece of work ; as it is, what a waste of energy that work becomes.

There is not the smallest reason for this clumsy attempt at cheating people into the belief that they are where they are not. A Theatre is an interior, an artificial place, lighted artificially, which is one of its chief beauties ; insistence on trying to make it otherwise is quite illogical.

The whole art and charm of the Theatre is its artificiality, which should stimulate the decorator in making the most flighty, fantastic, dramatic, or tragic use of his imagination by presenting that which is frankly artificial, and all the more beautiful for that reason.

Mr. Norman Wilkinson, whose name will be familiar to you as one of our best workers in the Theatre, says apropos of this :

“ I cannot believe that stage trees can ever have the natural life, or stage buildings the weathered and sunlit beauty that actual trees and buildings have, but they may possess structure and colour, and under an artificial light this may be a revelation of art and beauty that is satisfying.”

It might be interesting to mention here that the whole origin of the flatly painted scene is handed down to us as a tradition which had its origin in the architecturally built and permanent screen of the Italian Theatre of the Renaissance.

When Mr. Wilkinson and myself were called in to help produce what are known as the *Barker* Shakespeare productions at the Savoy Theatre, we used in our respective plays what may be described

as two forms of decorative scene, namely, front curtains and built scenes, the latter occupying the whole of the existing stage proper, the former acting as backgrounds for the short front stage scenes ; a double stage after the manner of the Elizabethan Theatre was used, thus making it possible to give a Shakespeare play, with its many changes of scene and action, without pause, and without cutting down the text.

These curtains were meant to be suggestive only of the time, place, and mood of the action that took place in front of them. There was no attempt at scenic illusion, only such colour and form being employed as were sufficient and appropriate both to the material used, and the suggestion which had to be implied. The curtains fell in broad folds, and the designs were painted on with dyes.

The built scenes on the stage proper, which constituted the main decoration, were solid, built in three dimensions, having plan and elevation, not flat pieces of canvas painted to look like what they were not, and attempting to give the design and plan that was demanded by the play, the charm of light and shade, line, form, and colour, which resulted from that and the mimes in front, and that alone.

Mr. Wilkinson sums up our endeavour as follows : " You will see that here was an honest attempt to give a play by Shakespeare simple and direct treatment, free from style and period, simply something that was a result of a thorough investigation of the play as it stood alone."

We had our own workshops, and in all respects we carried out what I have been advocating. The result of our experiment, though the method was very far from perfect, proved highly interesting, and revealed a world of possibilities.

The Barker Theatre is in England the only one which has the courage of experiment, and—may I be allowed to say it—thoughtful experiment,* and so I give it you as my example. If it can go on progressing along its present path, which it has reached with a mighty struggle, it promises to find for itself a place among the

* Since the above paragraph was written, Mr. Granville Barker has for the present, retired from management. I hear that several societies for experimenting in drama have been founded since the war. May they prosper.

more serious Theatres of Europe. It has achieved much already, but it attempts happily much more, and those only who know the appalling difficulties of building up a real and properly equipped Theatre will understand quite what this means.

Let me tell you what such a Theatre does mean.

The Théâtre des Arts in Moscow is an example, for it is the finest Theatre in Europe, and this means the world.

It has a trained and permanent staff of some three hundred and fifty people, actors, craftsmen, and the rest ; it supplies itself from start to finish. It will devote a year to the perfecting of one single production—if necessary two years. At another moment it will give twelve different plays on twelve consecutive nights. It is a sort of commune, a house of serious workers one and all, where a fine result, an artistic achievement, is the common aim. It does not set out to make money, it sets out to try and realise what is fine and noble, it stands for an idea. It means also, and this is by no means of the least importance, that in Russia and in Moscow there are people who want such a Theatre, really want it, need it, and use it ; therefore they get it. That such people exist, in itself makes possible the existence of such a Theatre.

So I am hopeful for ourselves over here, for there are signs of an awakening. The more quickly these signs mature, then so much the better.

With this mention of the Moscow Art Theatre I have given you the example which I promised at the beginning of my paper. No record is more noble than that of this Theatre, and its work has been, and is, immense in its diversity, unequalled in the distinction and completeness of its manner of production.

Other Theatres we find in Europe of very great interest, but for more specialized reasons, such as the " Français " in Paris, whose catch-name " The House of Molière," most aptly describes it, it is the perfection of a strict tradition from which no departure is made or attempted, rather than a vigorous and life-giving breath.

From the histrionic standpoint we see in the French Theatre acting of a very wonderful and finished quality, but we are here not concerned with acting as such, but with the Theatre as a finished

whole, and in this respect France falls behind ourselves. Indeed there are only two theatres in Paris which have begun to make any effort or show any feeling, "Le Théâtre des Arts," which we can hardly take seriously, and, more recently, "Le Théâtre du Vieux Colombier," a more dignified effort altogether, though on a very tiny scale.

In Germany the Theatre is given every chance in the way of support, the result partly of the old Germany of many different states and kingdoms, each with its Court Playhouse, it lives a healthy life, attempting much, achieving not a little. It does not achieve, though, the very highest, for, as in their painting and other applied arts, the German mind of to-day, though it seizes eagerly on every idea, new or old, which it adopts enthusiastically, seems to lack that precise inspiration within itself which leads to a pure creation of its own. Their Theatre, nevertheless, is an extremely interesting thing, and even though we be at war with them, this must not affect our judgment or standard of æsthetics. The seriousness and effort of their Theatre is far ahead of our own, and must, in the end, lead to a fine result.

I am glad to say that in the first instance, the chief inspiration of the modern Theatre in Germany came from us, though through a man whom we ourselves have treated badly enough, who is the greatest genius and inspiration the Theatre has had in our time, and from the standpoint of the "poetic drama," perhaps in any other. I allude to Edward Gordon Craig, son of an illustrious mother, Miss Ellen Terry.

We have made mention of an "ideal state of things" in which one man should be author, producer, decorator, in himself all in all; and I stated that there is living a person capable of fulfilling this office. It was of Craig I was thinking, and I feel that no paper on the subject we are discussing could be complete without the mention of his name and the admission of how much is due to him by all of us who work or have worked in the Theatre. No vision is so clear as his, no one has taught us so much as he.

Craig has had a greater effect on the Theatre of our time than any other single personality, his inspiration and influence have

flamed far and wide, too far and too wide, alas, for the whole world uses him and has used him, where we in England have given him the cold shoulder. He lives now away from us, devoting his energies to a school for the art of the Theatre, where he himself may experiment, and where students and disciples may go to learn every branch of the crafts and engineerings of it.*

His wonderful designs and drawings are published, and we may read his books, but his personal inspiration is lacking, and for this we have to blame ourselves.

When shall we learn to treat well our men of genius and talent, to realize that artists even where they appear unpractical, may not be so in reality but when properly approached, and in a proper spirit, are prone to respond not only readily, but tenderly, to our needs? We have called Craig unpractical; sometimes we hold different views to his. These things are of no importance. The wrong and improper fact is that, having such a man among us, we are not clever enough to keep him and to use him.

It appears to me that it is we ourselves, our managers, and our men of business who are unpractical in this matter.

Wherever he is, Craig's labours, at least, are unceasing: he is wrapped up body and soul in the art he loves so well and so passionately, and wherein he shows himself so profound an artist, worker, and inventor.

So his generosity extends to us, and we are the richer.

§ V

Glancing again at Russia and Germany, and their Theatres, I suggest that the chief reason for a greater and more advanced art in these countries is in the fact that (and more especially in Russia) there are people who are not only willing, but think it a reasonable and proper thing that certain ideas should exist as an end in themselves in relation to art; and holding this belief, do not expect these ideas always to succeed financially. They are, on the contrary, willing to provide them with financial support, realising that

* The activities of this School have, I understand, been temporarily suspended as a result of the War.

without such, an idea must die like everything else, and so lose its chance of development.

We, on the other hand, are a practical people, and pride ourselves in this fact. We may encourage the birth of ideas, but we are very apt to starve them afterwards and let them die. We endow, for instance, a "chair" or school, and educate up to a certain point, but once this limit has been reached we say: "Now we have given you this start, fend for yourselves and let us see." In other words: "Show you've been worth the money spent on you and now earn some yourself." We don't provide the work for those we've trained to do it; we expect to see them find it somehow.

If they do find it, we are pleased and say: "You see I told you: 'A' is doing well." But when "B" comes to a standstill, apparently, then it is simply: "Ah, what did I say? There's nothing in this job or 'B.'"

This you may consider an exaggeration, but I do feel that in relation to those countries which I have just mentioned, it holds good, and certainly this view of things in relation to art is realised to a fuller extent by them. In their Theatre, not only is a high standard looked for and encouraged, but their artists and craftsmen, when trained and competent, are given the work to do; whilst for the Theatre itself, sufficient support is found that it may stand fair and free, and not depend entirely on making of itself a financial success. This support is given sometimes by the State, sometimes privately. One way or another it is always to be found.

It may interest you to know that in the case of the Moscow Art Theatre the ideas it set out to embody have justified themselves from a financial point of view. After thirteen years of life it now pays extremely well.* We must remember always that good things are in themselves no more expensive than bad things, indeed very often they may be less so.

Of the result of these systems we have had here latterly much opportunity of judging.

Rheinhardt has produced his plays, and the Russian Ballet is a

* These remarks, possibly, still hold good. I am informed that the Theatre is as live an institution in Russia now as before.

constant and regular visitor, certainly the "Coq d'Or" and "Petrouchka," to mention two of the latter's productions, are, from the point of view of decoration and complete oneness and unity, among the finest things this country has seen.

As a rule the Russian Ballet, as we see it here, has not been wholly perfect. It has fallen a little between two stools in its desire to show us what it can do, on the one hand, and its hesitation as to how much we will stand on the other, and I have no doubt but that in its own home it is a much more finished and perfect affair.

Furthermore, it seems to me to be at its best when it shows its more pure and stylistic side (with the exceptions of the "Coq d'Or" and "Petrouchka"), and the employment of Léon Bakst for some of its productions, here and in France, has struck a jarring note of plagiarism and sensational vulgarity. Bakst has no place in the Theatre, and in Russia finds none.

He is an indifferent painter of indifferent pictures, with a certain "flair" and talent for the adaptation of sensational themes, but as a designer for the Theatre his work is of a second-rate and meaningless character. He never creates, always taking an old formula and dressing it up as a new one.

§ VI

In turning aside to discuss the more general state of the Theatre we wandered away from the actual subject matter we had in hand. We will return now to our muttons.

In deciding that the fundamental problem of decoration, apart from the play itself, is the value or relationship between actor and setting, and as we have reached a certain conclusion with regard to this setting or background, we come now, automatically, face to face with the actor, and as we are concerned with the Decoration only, this resolves itself into the question of clothes, for as the actor is inseparable from his background the decoration of the one must be inseparable from the decoration of the other.

Let us, then, discuss this question of clothes and all the appurtenances of the mime.

You will remember that your decorator not only must design all the clothes, but must have them carried out in each and every detail. He must know what materials to use for each dress in order to achieve the effect of his design. He must design and make the pattern on each piece of material used, by appliqué, painting, or the use of dyes. He must arrange his colour scheme, and know exactly how each of his figures will be grouped throughout the play, nothing, in short, is left to chance. The same applies to the wigs, head-dresses, jewellery, shoes; the whole and complete dressing of the mime from tip to toe.

Having reminded you of this, we can now go into the question of how we should design, and what regard we should have for Period, Time, and Place.

To begin with, I hold that it is wrong simply to attempt to copy from the past. In the matter of designing clothes the same principles as I have put before you in relation to setting and background hold equally good. If we take to the fashion-plate for our inspiration—a fashion-plate, dead and lifeless, will be the only result. The truth of this we see for ourselves in all theatres where such doings are common practice. You must remember, too, that the unforgiveable error is committed of the clothes coming from a costumier, the scenery from a scenic artist's studio, between whom there is no combination of ideas. We will, however, not go further into the wrong method, but attempt to explain the right.

The Theatre, we have decided, is a place where we require imagination. When we design clothes for it we must use inventiveness, building on a foundation of knowledge of the particular moment or period, but re-creating it, making of it a living thing—avoiding the lifeless dummy. It is necessary to convey an *impression* of a particular moment or period: if we successfully convey this, then the moment or period will exist for the audience.

Here, then, is the necessity, and you will perceive it evolves itself again into a matter of suggestion and not of imitation. All things were and are possible, in the matter of fashion, in all times and at any time; and who is to lay down the law?

No, we must re-make and re-invent each time we set to work,

and provided we do so with sufficient instinct, sense of our art, and creative power, we bring forward a living thing.

Creation of this kind appears, indeed, to be the principle aim of any art.

With regard to all those objects we use in the Theatre which we call "properties," and by which we mean anything from a statue, a fountain, a bench, or a chair down to a box, a fan, or any article whatsoever: to the designing and making of all these the same principles will be applied and observed. They are a part of the whole, and require the same care as all the rest.

So with our workers in the Theatre. We must produce men and women and train them to take a serious view of the importance of it as a whole.

Decoration must not be regarded as of secondary importance, a minor thing which, at a pinch, we can do without. It may be as simple as you please, but it must be right in value and in balance, and it is essential.

No single side of the Theatre can stand up and say: "I am enough in myself," for each side (and every single worker) is a part of a single idea.

Our mimes are not immune from the common responsibility; they must learn to behave as they are required in the matter of their clothes and wigs, just as they are used and trained to do when it is a question of their acting, gesture, voices, and movement.

It is impossible that they should realize what they look like when, seeing themselves alone in their small dressing rooms, they judge of an effect. They do not then think of themselves as part of a whole conception, but their point of view is temporary and personal.

My time is drawing to an end. We cannot here go into such detail as the stage proper, with its machinery as wonderful and as complicated as the workings and rig of any ship, and its capacities as regards lighting. This latter is a subject and a study in itself. Needless to say though, it is one of the most important items, or should be so, of the decorator's knowledge, and it affords a field of almost unlimited scope and possibility.

§ VII

In conclusion, I would like to say to you a few words with regard to the position of the artist decorator in our Theatre to-day.

I have tried very hard to give some notion of what decoration in the art of the Theatre should represent and mean. If I have wearied you by insisting too much, or too often, on the importance of the decorator himself and his duties, I ask your forgiveness. It is, though, only by shouting out very loudly and very clearly from our housetops that we in this world stand any chance of being heard. If we insist much, we get perhaps a little ; if we insist little we probably get nothing.

What I am about to say now is more than ever a beating of our gentleman's drum, but it is to sound a note of entreaty and not of praise. If I have a little made you feel with me that which I feel very passionately, that good artists are needed in our Theatre, that fine work can be done there, must be done there, and is intended to be done there ; I would ask you to agree that these good artists must be afforded the means to devote lives of patience, keen inspiration and intelligence to this work which, at present, we treat with scant attention, and which we should learn to respect, not as a passing thing done for our amusement or satisfaction, or with which to ease our digestions, but as we respect any other form of art : a thing which demands our care and love, and a permanent place and home.

When we learn this, then, believe me, will the right men appear in the Theatre, who will justify both themselves and us. Until we have learnt it is hardly worth their while. We ask and offer too little, and it is not the exception we require, but the rule.

One word more, and that is, I beg you not to look upon my remarks as made by one who wishes to stand before you and be labelled a " Reformer." Nothing could be further from my thoughts or intention. There is nothing to reform. What we must do is to build, the rest does not matter.

LEEDS UNIVERSITY, *February*, 1915.

- Cover. "Mademoiselle de Maupin"—A ballet.
- Plate I. Working plan for a revolving scene, designed in three dimensions, used in "Androcles and the Lion," by G. B. Shaw, St. James's Theatre, London, 1912.
- Plate II. Dress design for Madame Anna Pavlova in "Le Réveil de Flore"—A ballet.
- Plate III. Working design for the front curtain of a scene, "Androcles and the Lion."
- Plate IV. Plate III. as carried out and hung in the Theatre.

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No. 2

Flare

Matang: Guya Pastov.2.



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analyse type of growth site & Bud (new) & stalk (and 4)
3rd winter.
same again as we saw at lake & in relation to island
spots

Swamp & strays were seen
brown white
no v. orange male - 40
2 and only some others
- B. on flowers & 17
white

Plate II

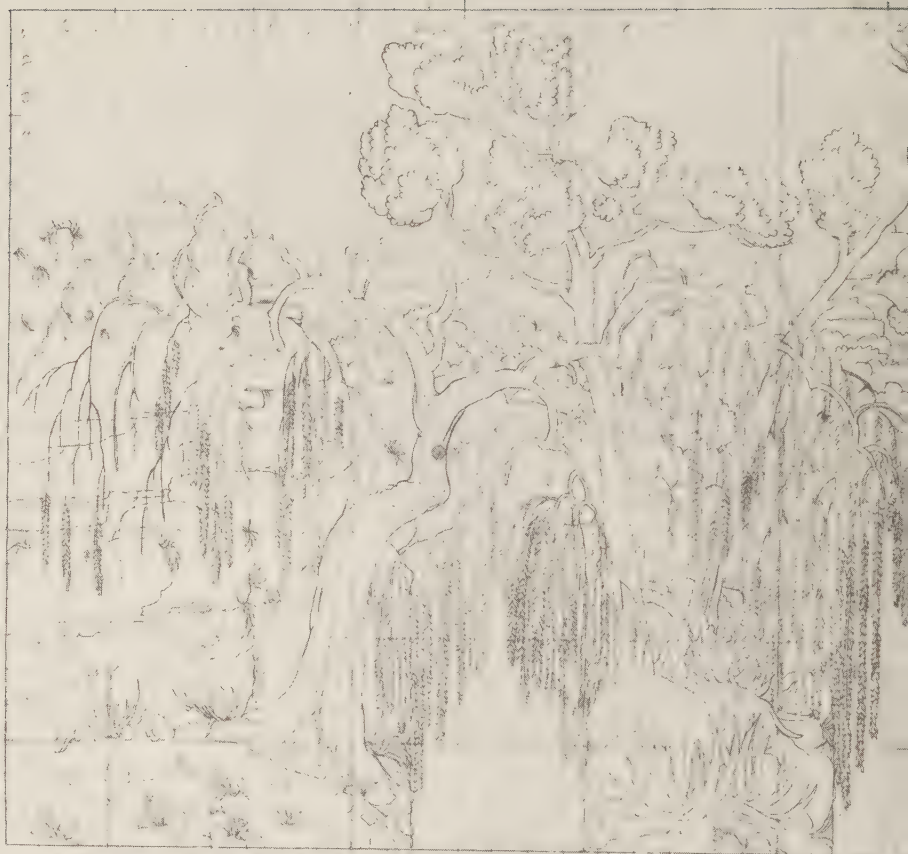


Plate III

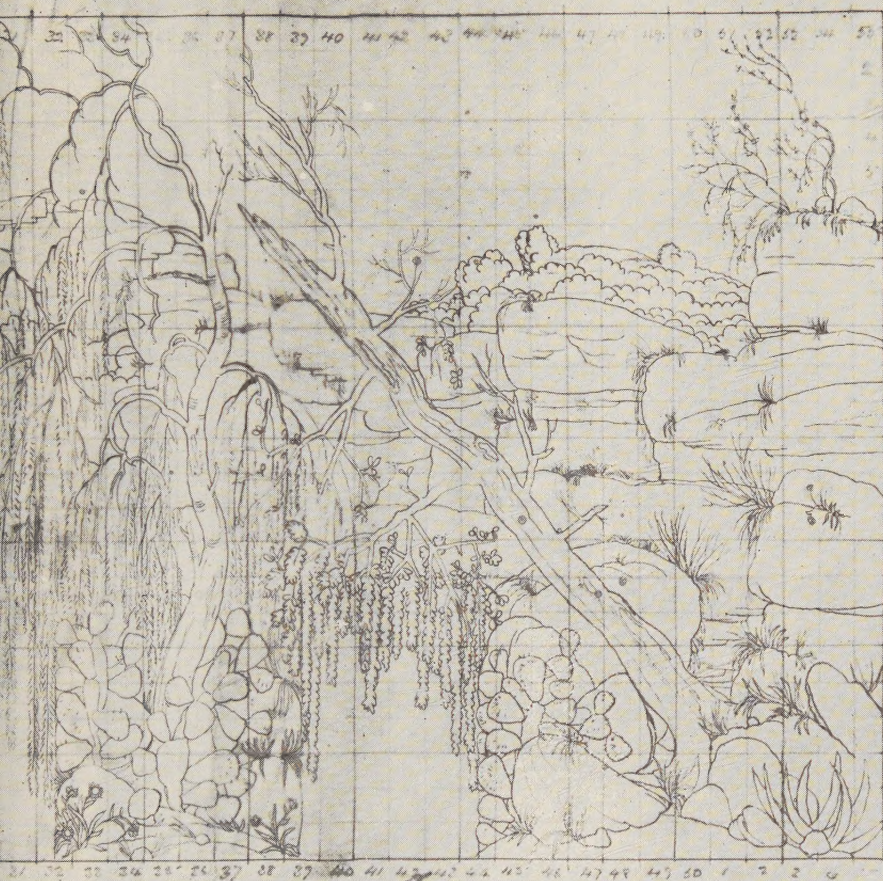




Plate IV

THE following is a rough scheme of the projected contents of the remaining numbers for the half-year ending December, 1919 :—

SEPTEMBER.—Five Critical Essays on the Present State of English Poetry.

OCTOBER.—A Critical and Bibliographical Review (with quotations) of the French Poetry of the Present Time. By F. S. FLINT.

NOVEMBER.—Annotated Bibliography of poetry, drama, etc., published during the past year, together with list of authors and books published during the past five years.

DECEMBER.—A Collection of Songs, with Music.

The Chapbook, No. I (July 1919), may still be obtained of all the principal Booksellers. It contains 23 New Poems by Contemporary Poets.

